

Cave Movements

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The Politics of Practice
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A cave is a place, and a cave has space. It has an opening, the mouth of the cave, and the rest, —the cave walls, ceiling, and floor—is it the “closing?” Being inside is to be in a particular quality of an environment, surrounded by earth. It’s dark inside. It gets darker the farther one gets to the “belly,” and lighter as one comes forward. It can be so quiet in there, as soil absorbs sound.

Over the multitudes of times I have spent in caves, I have become curious how each experience is unlike the others. I am also curious how the encounters effect my relationship to body-environment; caving reveals my sense of being-in-place and being in communication with place, and yet somehow, at the same time, gives me feedback about my own body-being. When I go inside, I am alone, and yet I can experience being connected, even supported, and upon exit greater sensitivity to the surroundings and the spaciousness of my breathing. There are so many paradoxes with caving and the lived experience. By going into a cave, “outside” of society and “alone,” it becomes clear that we are always in interaction, with our own thinking, with the surroundings, with.

I am curious about time-space, how caves offer *for the time being*: cave time. Time is marked through entering and exiting. The curiosities seem infinite, as caves are both generative and regenerative, an opening into the unknown. This is due in part to the fecundity of darkness, and to slowing down. Being in caves can have an effect well beyond the seeming frame of the experience, but one cannot predict how it will play out.

A score: If you make little caves, palming your eyes for a while, when you release your hands you just might sense or see more brightly than before. Darkness supports and is inextricably linked to the vividness of the sensorial experience.

Context: in the Dark, Together

Cave Forms is a project that emerged out of caving. In 2015, I had a distinct felt sense that compelled me to caves and to making basic fort-like structures in my home and studio. This evolved into a nourishing practice I called *Caving*. In its simplest form, *caving* is comprised of either spending time in darkness under built caves, most often cotton moving blankets, or spending time in actual outdoor caves. Caving invited me to slow down, to receive the feedback of weight and the space and place created by the fabric, to feel the sensorial details of the enskinning and how they were continuously changing. The prompt in the cave each time was that whatever one does in there was ok: moving, stillness, sleeping, sounding, whatever. So often I felt rejuvenation, and came to call *caving* a “nourishing practice.”

From this seemingly simple operation, I got interested in how these built caves might appear, and an aesthetic practice emerged which became *Cave Forms*, a project along with *Caving* that has taken many media from 2015 to present—group encounters, performances, an ongoing outdoor research collective, videos, creative cave practicing with colleagues, festival-like constellations of multi-varied events, workshops and a paired *caveagogy*, and a “vivid” archive. To this day, I offer *caving* in the context of my facilitation both one-on-one and in groups if the situation calls for it, and find it a powerful resource to return to for the benefits it brings in nourishing life, — both for health and for incubating ideas. This cave practice has the quality of (rest; it holds the potential for many forms.

In the most simple form, one enters under a moving blanket and stays for a period of time, 10 minutes, 20 minutes, or perhaps in one’s own timing. So many ways of being and working can come from simply this. Each time a different experience, based on all the elements of that particular place, time, and condition.

For the majority of the *Cave Forms* project, I worked closely with Mara Poliak and Frances Rosario in the realms of performance, life art process, rehearsal, and inquiry. Alongside our trio (as “cave hags”), I would meet with Asia Wong in Inverness, where we would practice *caving* and *cave forms* scores in a hidden cave by the bay. This “alongside” project, which is already an alongside kind of project, provided a link in the studio to moving outdoors, working with the elements, the changing of seasons and tides, and invited the studio practice to be led by the quietude and life force of nature. There were a multitude of other people who collaborated in different streams of the *Cave Forms* constellations over time.



Cave Form-ing, Cave Coast Collective, Big River, Mendocino. Photo by Chani Bockwinkel, 2016.

A paradox: people have been caving for time immemorial, and yet the incubational aspect of the cave brings the new. Dark enclosures have been used in so many contexts. To name just a

few of these: Taoist and Buddhist hermits in the Kunlun mountains; the forts so many children make; and John Cage's famous 1951 visit to an anechoic chamber where he was able to hear both the high and low the sounds of his own bodily processes. In the field of experimental movement and dance performance, there are a range of artists whose resonant work has choreographed with darkness and cloth, for example, Daria Fain and Robert Kocik's Prosodic Body *The Anechoic NAAD Dark Room* (2008), Luciana Achugar's *Puro Deseo* (2010), and BodyCartography Project's *Felt Room* (2016). Each of these projects were presented by U.S. cultural institutions, and in each of these instances, use of cave-like sets provided a novel situation for participants with darkness, and blurred the distinctions of subject and environment.

From my vantage, the *Cave Forms* constellation is comprised of instances of enacting the "outwith," what Lynette Hunter describes in relation to the politics of practice as "not sayable," "not accounted for by the boundaries," and "a positionality that forms from emergence."¹ These cave activities were mainly self-produced and collectively organized, save for a few residencies and performances, which were presented through the network of artistic and dance colleagues I have been in conversation with for decades. The *Cave* activities, which have a quality of stepping outside of dominant ideological frameworks, outside the the speed and progressive push of Capital, into the unknown, were produced in contexts alongside the art world, in small studios and outdoors. And yet, the approaches fundamentally supported artmaking and creative practices out from which art is produced. Even *Caving* cannot be completely outwith.

What is compelling about this positionality is how the work of *Cave Forms* is fundamentally based in and speaking with context and environment, and how giving attention to, slowing down, and composing with context can bring about so much change and creative life. It also pro-

vides a kind of space that affords a person to experience their connections with their built and natural environments. There is something about the paradox, porosity, and dialogue within and as part of ecologies that can offer perspectives on how *Cave Forms* operated, how the inside-outside, space-place, sensation-design, self-other, dark-vivid, and body-environment perhaps support the unfolding of these interconnected potencies. I believe that *Cave Forms* and *Caving* can contribute to the aggregate of fields I will call “embodied ecologies” along with performance studies, and in turn these beyond-binary pairings as representative of ecologies can give perspective to the unique operations of the *Cave* field. Reciprocally, they can provide some facets of understanding towards the nature of “things” in the sense that what exists starts with interaction first, and that thingness is both a limitation and a paradox in itself.

With this paper, I am going to share some reflections on *Caving* and *Cave Forms* by documenting events, sharing some of *Cave Forms* creative roots, and articulating some scores within them. I will offer this along with a discussion of some pertinent perspectives in fields of embodied ecological inquiry, in an attempt to define some ways body-environment has been defined in scholarship, how caving could provide a contribution to these fields.

I am curious about meshing with contexts, about how performance has the potential quality of creating ecologies for others, about capacities to modulate in relation with environment as an agential practice, and how these approaches support both individual’s creative evolution and perhaps beyond into the sociosituated and then sociocultural context. All of this languaging is tricky, because once the limitations of *haecceity*, or “thingness,”² is acknowledged, revealing the paradoxes and inherent interaction amongst seemingly separate entities, then it becomes clear that words can reduce the richness of the co-mingled concert of lived experience.

But forge ahead, here. Breathe, making space in one's own body-being, taking time to receive the surroundings, and feel all the places the skin is a surface of connection, having pores, sphincters, in conversation with place. And perhaps, one morphs with the ecology, giving way and loosing the frame.

Porosity / Opening and Closing

With *Cave Forms*, one of the ways real-time movement composition occurred was through opening and closing the cloth. With a heavy fabric, one can play with how close to the skin the cave is, create living sculpture, and can open and close this built environment. One can filter how much one is visible and sharing space with the outer environment. Opening and closing becomes a basis for composing. With the feedback of touch one could have greater awareness of one's skin, less as an encasing surface and more as porous and sensuary.³ I have often wondered if this phenomenon arises because the cave does "the work" of the skin for us, or because we slowed down and come more fully into our senses, or both, or some other combination. This is at the crux of this paper; how did the cloth, or a cave, invite more access to the ways we are already in communication?

In Janet Mock's book, *Redefining Realness*, she explains how James Baldwin defines identity as 'the garment with which one covers the nakedness of the self,' The garment should be worn 'loose' he says, so we can 'always feel our nakedness.' This trust in one's nakedness is all that gives one the power to change one's robes."⁴ This idea, clearly addressing identification with simultaneously broader implications, became a centralizing intention for a series of *Cave Forms* performances in Spring 2016, *Cave Forms Performance Constellation*, and particularly the

evening length piece performed twice, called *Cave Forms: BARE PERFORMANCE*. The week-end of performances and encounters all took place at Temescal Arts Center (TAC), in Oakland, where I have been a resident artist for years. In the rehearsals and live performances, we worked specifically with this potential for porosity and communication, with an intention of looseness, nudeness, and mobility, and asked the question, “what if we could feel the same sense of support and communication inside the cave and out?” We imagined caves with windows, and our own energetic windows.



Cave Forms: BARE PERFORMANCE, Temescal Arts Center, Oakland. Video Still, by A. Hud, March 2016.

This idea of movement consisting of opening and closing, which I translated into mediating through a cloth cave in performance with others, come directly from the practice of *Amerta* Movement, a contemporary free movement form invented Javanese movement artist, Suprpto Suryodarmo (or “Prapto”). As a practitioner of Amerta Movement since 2000, many of the ap-

proaches and views are emmeshed in the ways I move, and become the source for practice, as well as choreography. In the summer of 2014, Prapto explained the Javanese term *nerasoh*, or wearing clothing, is connected to the quality of opening and closing, and he further explained how there are consequences in too much opening, and how it is useful to be able to read the details that are unique to each situation, and choose. This is a person's capacity for filtering in relation to the surroundings, and in is poetically and functionally like skin.⁵ From the perspective of Amerta Movement, this capacity to choose, to filter, is an access to the emergence of composing, and is an instance of what would be termed, "living measurement."⁶ Clothing therefore has the quality for the basis of design, and as movers, we can choose our cloth.⁷

In terms of interaction with the environment, *Cave Forms* expanded from the elementals of opening, closing, composing and filtering, creating modulation in interaction with place. By slowing down in practice and in the process of the work, we could track our own experience and sensations, and from that allow for the composing to take place with a sense that we could "see" the room from within the cloth, or perhaps better, receive the atmosphere, and improvise from that felt experience.

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For many months, Frances, Mara, and I had also been practicing a foundational score which was based on three intentions that one could play simultaneously or in alternation that became the underlying practice of *Cave Forms BARE*. These were prompts based on variations off of "tuning" scores, which are real-time compositional practices developed by contemporary choreographer Lisa Nelson. Lisa once told me about the "Law of Three Things," that she understood a person can attend to maximum three things at a time, and I had been interested in spend-

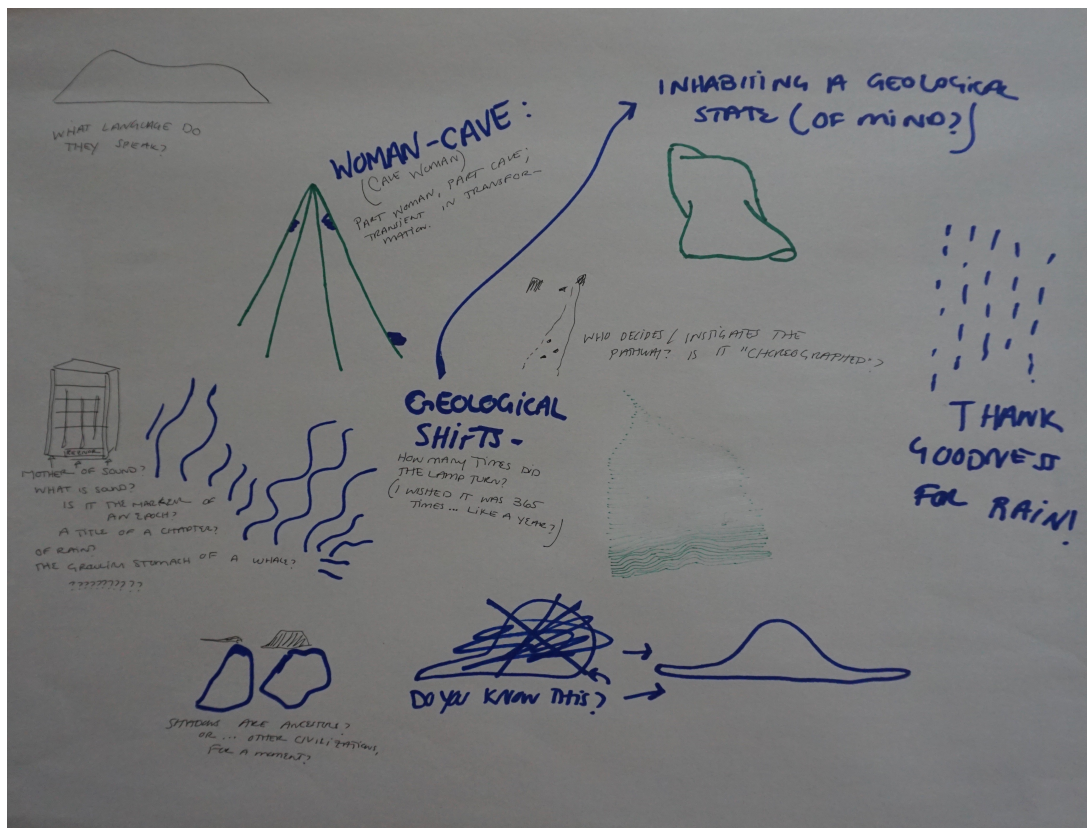
ing more time with it. The score: 1) No creativity —no pressure to do anything special or interesting when making forms with the cave, 2) Single images —a simplified variation off of the “single image score,” practice enacting single actions, stay simple, and experience the transitions in between, and 3) Sensation and design —the name of a workshop “tuning” scores practitioner Karen Nelson taught for several years in the late ’90’s, which morphed now in the *Cave Forms* context; based off of an elemental tuning “inversion” into a more dissolved approach, we played with the spectrum from the multisensorial felt sense of moving with the cave to the imagined visual image of the cave forming as it moved and was moved. This was a practice in receiving the reciprocities of inside-out, self-other, and communion.

Interestingly, these facets of the practice had a quality of paradox. For example, in working with No creativity, we found that it eliminated pressure and enabled us to stay connected with presencing, rather than “trying to,” and what emerged was beautiful to witness; and in working single images so slowly, intentionally and sensorially, it opened up so many intricacies of action that it was rather more like an unending stream with for-the-time-being moments to receive it all.



Cave Forms: BARE PERFORMANCE, Temescal Arts Center, Oakland. Video Still, by A. Hud, March 2016.

The movement portion of the *BARE* piece was about 35 minutes, simply a space to watch the forms changing and changing. After the audience found their place, we started by looking at the empty space together from the vantage of the audience, and then simultaneously went into our respective cloths for most all of the duration. TAC itself has a cave-like quality. Each audience was additionally given a paper with a hole cut out, “when you find yourself drifting, here’s a window to look through.” At the end of the performance, large paper and markers were distributed to the audience members, and they were invited to “digest” their experiences through making a visual document. These different elements provided instigations for the audience members to both reflect on how they participate in composing the work, and amplified possibilities for creation. The drawings also provided vital feedback for the performers, who experienced most of the show from underneath cloth.



you are a worm and you
why don't you do something
why are you so slow?
why are you so slow?
why are you so slow?

From the vivid archive. {For a one minute time-lapse of some archives from *Cave Forms BARE*, as well as a performers' group map drawing, see link: <https://vimeo.com/487905064/b3884a29ef>. To take time with an image, press pause or the space bar.}

Over the course of several years of practice together, I, along with the other players in the project, developed many scores that would emerge from spending time in the cave and watching desires and actions arise, sometimes following them, sometimes fallowing. Caving has a quality of (rest, in that something happened to the performer/caver in the morphed ecology in the stillness and not-knowing, an emergence of a way of practice, or an idea for trying something, the predecessor to a score. In addition to this (rest-ful quality, or because of it, so many pre-score moments would arise, and rather than being in the flow of movement so they would pass the players by, they were attended to, and many could be brought into practice. This quality of (rest also worked on a larger operational level, in that in my experience in the larger arc of *Caving* into *Cave Forms* over the course of several years, I would watch the steps of making and choreographing, and was able to articulate them, and through doing so this enabled the process of making the be made visible, and this became the basis for a pedagogical / caveagological articulation.

Some of the many scores that arose from (rest are worth mentioning, because they reflect and enact the ecological and porous view of *Cave Forms*:

- a. "Transduction:" when come to a wall, touch it through the cloth or with one's body, and feel the structure of the whole room through that single point of contact.
- b. "Unison intuition:" this one is a variation on a "tuning" score that showed up through (rest, two performers from within their caves move and stillness in unison, based on sensing, on intuition, and on the synchronicities of interaction.
- c. "The ground of togetherness:" inspired by my collaborations with movement artist Julie Nathanielsz, the cave hags would practice an overscore, where in relation to what was

happening locally, or what score one was giving attention to, the performers would intend to sense the relations of the whole space, each other, and the atmosphere.

- d. “Pores:” while in the cave, through rest, slowing down, and listening, start to feel the pores of the face, eyes, ears, mouth, and move from listening, waking up the skin and the space between the person and cloth. Feel the weight of the cloth and allow the material to open and close through one’s own dance.

Embodied Ecologies and the Collective

There have been multiple theoretical approaches developed and articulated over the past several decades which shed light on the inherent interaction of body-environment. These are alternatives to Cartesianism and other atomizing views which have informed pervasive ideologies of individualism and the self as separate from context. Embodied ecological perspectives can help articulate how experiences of communication, porosity, and paradox take place for participants of *Cave Forms* —performers, audience, and *caving* practitioners alike, —and likewise, are a field where *caving* could contribute.

In order to gather some varied approaches as a constellation, I will use the phrase “embodied ecologies,” working off of Melissa K. Nelson, a contemporary Bay Area indigenous scholar, from her chapter “Getting Dirty: The Eco-Eroticism of Women in Indigenous Oral Languages.”⁸ Ecologies work with the environment as living communicative systems, and *embodied* ecologies, a term created by Catherine Baumgartner as referenced in the writing is a process of uncovering the essential role of the embodied sensory experience in human relationships to the places they inhabit. This practice can support decolonizing our whole beings and nature, by dissolving the subject/object binary and claiming new theoretical frameworks, such as Stacy Alaimo’s “trans-corporeality,” where corporeal and environmental theories “meet and mingle.”

Nelson envisions an intellectual ecosystem that reveals the enmeshed relations human have with the more-than-human world, additionally referring to Anna Tsing's evocative statement, "human nature is a multi-species relationship." Melissa K Nelson's research is resonant with the work of colleague and fellow indigenous scholar Kim TallBear, both who are making the connections between eco-erotics and embodied kinship with other species and natural phenomenon. There is much to learn from Traditional Ecological Knowledge concerning a relational perspective with the environment.⁹

Enmeshment is a phenomenon that is well researched in the cluster of scholars that look at "enactivism," or situated embodied cognition, such as Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and other contributors to 4E cognition. The "E's" are embodied, embedded, enacted, and extended, and now have expanded beyond four. They address how thinking is a whole body process, functioning in a related external environment, in relation to what the organism *does*, and necessarily extended into the environment.¹⁰ Overall, this enactive view expresses how thinking is a kind of "sense-making," bringing forth what is significant, or emergent.¹¹ Alongside this cluster, in the research of Fred Moten, the privilege of emergence is revealed, as different identity markers will determine the freedom of space for emergence, and thus one may need to cunningly invent spaces that can afford such a liberatory quality in becoming.¹²

Spring, 2016: thirteen of us gather for a five-day tour up the California coast as part of the Cave Coast Collective stream of Cave Forms. We start ceremonially in Inverness at the original cave, taking turns entering, and in a score, we each spent time alone in the cave and then with another in the overlap; time for encounters in and with the cool dark cave space, to see

what shows up in the intermix. We were meshing with the coast and meshing with one another, and found ourselves as “continuum.”

“Body-environment” as a term was coined by Eugene Gendlin, who in his book, *A Process Model*, defines multiple types of environments, including the dominant perspective of body and environment as separate, and leading towards a view that “we are always in interaction.”¹³ He queries, is it possible to get out of the framework that we are “a thing and another thing to then put together,” and experience how we *are* the interaction and the situation. He uses the example of the lungs and air, the expanding of breathing, how they imply one another and how bodyness is the result of life process. Perspectives on emergent relationality, or “experience in the making” is also described in the work of Erin Manning, as in *Always More than One*, where the author defines the body, a *haecceity*, as a singularity, but at the same time a collectivity, as “transindividuation,” as “*always more than one*.”¹⁴ This kind of multiplicity can be seen also in current research on microbiomes, which have called into question the fact of an individual being at all.

We practiced and filmed at Duncan’s Cove, starting by lying or leaning against the surfaces of the cliffs and sand, and over time slowly came into movement by sensing our volume, as relief (bas-relief), then out further still into full living form, allowing for the dance to emerge with each other, the wind, the ocean, our skin, the cameras, etc, in living communication.

In a sense, Western scholarship is catching up and recovering the relationality that has been understood over history¹⁵ in multiple worldviews, and can be experienced through many who practice slowing down, or subtle and sensing moving. From my study in Chinese Medicine, Taoist practices, and *qigong*, for example, the human is viewed in relation, as process, and com-

mingling with the cycles and rhythms of life, or *jie qi*. This can be seen even in the the basic fact that there is no term for a living “body” in Chinese, rather *shenti*, “body-person,” whereas “body” in English comes from the Old German *budha* meaning “tub” or “container.”¹⁶ If our experience upon slowing down is more porous and connected, yet the language requires the thingness of things, how can the findings of this kind of movement research support the expansion of the person as the lived experience? Is the person in a cave, or with a cave, or perhaps in cave process?

Another facet of embodied ecology comes from one of the great thinkers of living processes, Gregory Bateson, whose ecological aesthetics explore the participatory and adaptive patterning that is underlying the connections between processes of life.¹⁷ His work provides a bridge and brings the creative nature of reality to a living systems point of view.¹⁸ Bateson’s work has been extended by Wendy Wheeler, who through “biosemiotics” traced the reductive operations set out through nominalism in the development of science, and through thinking about living communicative systems examined how formal and organizational patterns in nature are repeated in cultural and aesthetic contexts¹⁹. Bateson’s work is also carried forth through the collaboration of Sandra Reeve with Bateson’s daughter, Nora Bateson, the former defining the sustaining potential and “delicate reciprocity” of the ecological body and the latter experimenting with *warm data*, or the kind of information people gather as they move, to understand their environment.²⁰ This merging of ecology, embodiment, aesthetics and dance practice is a vital assemblage in understanding how *Cave Forms* helps instantiate and provide opportunities for creative unfolding with context.

At Duncan's Cove, not only did we feel the difference in volume from cave to cove, but also I had scouted there was a crevice right by the ocean, and we each took turns entering, experiencing the compression and charge of this different kind of space. From there, dancing.



Kevin C Lo and Frances Rosario, Cave Coast Collective, Duncan's Cove. Photo by Chani Bockwinkel, 2015.

The Cave Coast Collective continues until today, a loose aggregate of multi-disciplinary artists practicing art-action, whose focus has morphed into conversation about the ethics and fertility of ecological land practices, artists' migrations, and settler colonialism with artmaking.

Doreen Massey: space is the sphere of the possibility of the existence of multiplicity, never completed, a product of interrelations²¹.

Bateson's views, along with James J. Gibson, — whose research perhaps could now be called enactive perceptual theory, who investigated how perception and sensation are systems embedded in action, experience, and context, — were both great instigations for “tuning” scores, and therefore my own choreographic work described here, as their research incited Lisa Nelson to practice sensory-perceptual composition. These theoretical perspectives fundamentally questioned the static nature of lived experience, thereby supporting the experience so often understood by movers, dancers, meditators, walkers, and sensitive people, alike. Lisa Nelson, other tuning scores practitioners, and this *caving* work have taken some of the propositions of these perceptual theorists into new gradations of perceptual idea-creation through practice, and the findings would make sense constellated within this ecological field.

From the perspective of performance scholar Lynette Hunter, when an ecology “happens,” this self that you had thought was a thing is not there.²² There are no “things” in ecologies. Rather, it is a web, a fluidity, having already morphed into the surroundings. She further describes how a lot of practices are set up to train the practitioner to become this. This resonates in my experiences with *Caving* and *Cave Forms*. Hunter asks the question, “How does a performer build the collaborative environments needed to support the ecologies of change that enable performance to work politically?”²³ My perspective is that by enacting embodied ecolo-

gies, taking the time to (rest, in these *cave* encounters, and practicing “alongside” formations of movement art and research, this evocation is enacted.

While these descriptions of embodied ecologies — and their paired *cave practices* encounters — may be somewhat extensive, they are in no way comprehensive. The *Cave Forms* constellation is a context in which multiple ways of practice arose; each artistic set-up offered a different quality of interactions. The caves, both natural and built provide a material structure that both offers an environment to follow one’s own growing and at the same time mediates the awareness and experience of it. Out of the dark, rises vibrant experiences, by bringing them into the light.

Just as there are paradoxes in being in the lived body, so too are the paradoxes in the practices with caves. From the discussion of embodied ecologies, one of the most prominent and baffling paradoxes made visible has to do with the possibility of anything existing of its own. If there are no things, are there even caves, were we actually “in” them, or solely “with?” What are the paradoxical properties of the outwith? Can one ever be alone? *Caving* incubates, and *Cave Forms* arise out of an attention toward an ecological aesthetic process. Earth time is so slow, one can imagine the kind of geologic time that is the becoming-into-cave, and it helps to see how a half-hour or so in a piece of cloth is not really so long at all, ... yet, it is a cleaving with the vagaries of daily living to enter in, and (rest. And see what comes.

Supported by *cave* practices, the communication amongst the elements, and porosity of their forms as things, invokes an experiential paradox which can take a participant out of understanding into living communication with the breathing of life.

{For an eight minute video on the Cave Forms Constellation, see: <https://vimeo.com/196529083>}

{For more information on *Caving*, *Cave Forms*, and the *Cave Coast Collective*, see. www.vividgrove.org}

¹ Hunter, *Politics of Practice*, 51.

² Hunter, December 2, 2020.

³ I learned the term “sensuary” through Lisa Nelson in 2004, who combined “sensual” and “sensory” to explain what happens in the experience of touch through her compositional work, “tuning” scores.

⁴ Mock, *Redefining Realness*.

⁵ Suprpto Suryodarmo, *Gardening Workshop*, 2014.

⁶ Interestingly, this practice of modulation is also quite present in other movement forms across cultures that I have worked with over time, particularly Wild Goose qigong.

⁷ In choosing and changing our cloth, we can make decisions about what can then become character in movement.

⁸ Nelson, *Getting Dirty*, 235.

⁹ One possible place to start is *A Textbook for the Ecocene*, edited by Sarita Dougherty.

¹⁰ Varela, Rosch, and Thompson, *Embodied Mind*.

¹¹ Thompson, *Expanding Our View*.

¹² Moten, 2020.

¹³ Gendlin, *A Process Model*, 4-8.

¹⁴ Manning, *Always More Than One*, 30.

¹⁵ Spelling to de-binarize the gender of the word

¹⁶ Zang, *Transforming Emotions*, 30.

¹⁷ Harries-Jones

¹⁸ Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*.

¹⁹ Wheeler, 2015

²⁰ Reeve, “Dynamic Conversations.”

²¹ Massey, *For Space*, 10.

²² Hunter, Oct 21, 2020.

²³ Hunter, *Politics of Practice*, 107.

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